

The New York Times takes on the social media “hordes”

By Andre Damon
3 April 2018

Since late 2016, the *New York Times*, working together with the US intelligence agencies and the Democratic Party, has been engaged in a campaign to promote internet censorship in the guise of targeting “fake news” and “Russian propaganda.”

In waging this campaign, the *Times*’ motives are both political and pecuniary. Speaking for a ruling elite that sees the growth of social opposition on all sides and expects far worse, the *Times* has promoted censorship to remove opportunities for the working class to organize outside the framework of official politics.

In addition, the *Times*, for the most part a clearinghouse for staid and predigested state propaganda, is seeking to carve back market share it has lost to online publications that carry out genuine investigative journalism and oppose the lies peddled by the US government and media.

In recent months, this campaign has entered a new and malignant phase. Increasingly dropping the pretext of “Russian meddling,” the *Times* is now directly attacking its main target: the fact that the internet, and in particular social media, helps empower the population to access oppositional sources of news and have their voices heard in public.

Among the *Times*’ latest broadsides against freedom of expression is an article by its “State of the Art” columnist Farhad Manjoo headlined “For Two Months, I Got My News From Print Newspapers. Here’s What I Learned.” The piece, supposedly written as a first-hand account of a journalist turning off social media and only reading the news from print newspapers, is—in an unusually literal sense—a piece of lying propaganda from beginning to end.

As the *Columbia Journalism Review* pointed out, during the period in which he supposedly stopped using

social media, Manjoo managed to post on Twitter virtually every day. “Manjoo remained a daily, active Twitter user throughout the two months he claims to have gone cold turkey, tweeting many hundreds of times, perhaps more than 1,000,” the *Review* pointed out.

Manjoo’s blatant falsifying of his own social media use is hardly the most sinister aspect of his piece. However, it expresses something essential about the *Times*’ notion of “reporting”: its writers feel they can say anything and get away with it, so long as their claims conform to the dictates of the establishment and the intelligence agencies whose interests determine what is and what is not reported in the US media.

The columnist’s dishonesty about his own activities provides much needed context for his article as a whole, which is little more than a long-form denunciation of a reading public that feels compelled to obtain its news from sources not massaged by the CIA-vetted hacks at the *New York Times*. In the process, Manjoo gives his unqualified blessings to the pronouncements of his own publication and castigates anyone who would question them as a member of an ignorant “herd,” whose opinions ought to be suppressed.

During his pretended sojourn into the desert of print media, Manjoo said he learned to value having the news spoon-fed to him by “professionals,” without having to worry about whether what he was reading was true or false.

As he puts it, “It takes professionals time to figure out what happened, and how it fits into context... This was the surprise blessing of the newspaper. I was getting news a day old, but in the delay between when the news happened and when it showed up on my front door, hundreds of experienced professionals had done

the hard work for me.”

He continues, “Now I was left with the simple, disconnected and ritualistic experience of reading the news, mostly free from the cognitive load of wondering whether the thing I was reading was possibly a blatant lie.”

Here, we assume, the reader is supposed to heave a sigh of relief. How soothing not to have to think for oneself! The author’s surrender of his critical faculties supposedly did wonders for his health and general well being. Not only did he become “less anxious,” but he had the time to “take up pottery” and “became a more attentive husband and father”! Wonderful! And so much more wonderful if he hadn’t actually made up the story about his abstinence from social media.

Manjoo’s condemnation of critical thinking aside, the real core of the piece is a scathing denunciation of the public, which he describes as a “herd” and a “crowd,” and which, moreover, is empowered to express its rotten opinions by the sinister power of social media.

“Avoid social [media],” he declares. “Technology allows us to burrow into echo chambers, exacerbating misinformation and polarization and softening up society for propaganda.”

The statements posted by the “online hordes” are not “quite news, and more like a never-ending stream of commentary, one that does more to distort your understanding of the world than illuminate it,” Manjoo adds. “On social networks ... People don’t just post stories—they post their takes on stories, often quoting key parts of a story to underscore how it proves them right.”

People are posting “their takes on stories!” The horror! Instead of just consuming the news as worked over by the *Times*, complete with big lies (“weapons of mass destruction”) and small ones (its technology columnist giving up Twitter for two months), social media allows users to critically examine the stories they read. In other words, the internet allows the public to bypass the monopoly of “professional” falsifiers and “gatekeepers” like Manjoo, Judith Miller, Thomas Friedman and the like.

The author’s only hope is that “the government” and “Facebook” will soon “fix” this problem. The clear implication is that once social media is “fixed,” the “herd,” “crowd,” and “hordes” will no longer be

allowed to pollute cyberspace by questioning the pronouncements of the *New York Times*. Manjoo’s self-righteous pontifications, worthy of Polonius (if Polonius were also a liar), would be comical if they were not so ominous. Faced with a growing wave of social struggles, the ruling elite is preparing censorship on a massive scale. Having succeeded in dramatically reducing traffic to left-wing web sites, the technology giants and intelligence agencies are proceeding to the next phase: censoring all expressions of social opposition, in particular by the working class, on social media.

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